



Robert Mayer. *Walter Scott and Fame. Authors and Readers in the Romantic Age*

Robert Mayer. *Walter Scott and Fame. Authors and Readers in the Romantic Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 224 p. ISBN 978-0-19-879482-0, USD 90 (hardcover).

Professor Mayer's book is an insightful, eye-opening exploration of the emergence of a new type of literary celebrity at the beginning of the nineteenth century based on close readings of Walter Scott's correspondence. Considered by Byron himself as "the first man of his time," Scott is an ideal case study due to the immense popularity he enjoyed during his lifetime as a result of his poetic and novelistic output, especially the Waverley cycle. Beautifully contextualized through comparisons with predecessors such as Pope and Johnson, contemporaries such as Wordsworth, Southey, and Byron, and successors such as Dickens, Hardy, and Hemingway, this study sheds considerable light on the evolution of literary celebrity in general and on the brand of celebrity that Walter Scott embodied in the public consciousness of his time in particular.

Unlike similar attempts at defining literary celebrity, *Walter Scott and Fame* provides a very nuanced analysis not only of Scott's construction of his authorial persona and his relationship with his fans but also of his engagement with his "intimates," colleagues, and "clients." These four categories of correspondents form the organizing principle of the study. The section on Scott's epistolary exchanges with his "intimates," or individuals closest to Scott due to their position as mentors (Anna Seward, the Dukes of Buccleuch, Lord Abercorn), confidants (J. B. S. Morritt, Lady Louisa Stuart, George Ellis), or both (Lady Abercorn), sheds light on their creation of "an exalted, romantic view of the maker of texts," one generally acknowledged as "someone possessed of magical [literary] powers" (59). In turn, Scott considers them as authorized critical readers of his texts and is open to their suggestions for improvement or advice on accepting or declining the laureateship in 1813. The section on Scott's colleagues — one that this reader found most rewarding to peruse — focuses on his relationship with contemporaries who provided him with materials for his poems or novels (Joseph Train) and especially with authors whose reputation was well-established at the time (William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, Joanna Baillie, Maria Edgeworth, James Hogg). This chapter provides useful insight into how these authors conceptualized authorship and their relationship with each other, their readers, and the "bookselling animal" (as Scott calls it in a letter to Southey). Interestingly, when compared to the Lake Poets, Scott seems to be the more "modern" of the two in his understanding of the profession and accommodating approach to his readers; equally interesting, his correspondence with his female colleagues underscores the fact that Scott is "less committed to a patriarchal politics" of writing (85) than some of them, Edgeworth included, are. The

section on “clients” — individuals who seek to advance their own careers through appeals to Scott’s literary or financial help — highlights the author’s active self-fashioning as an approachable celebrity, one that engages affably with his readers and, in doing so, builds a sympathetic relationship with them. By casting himself in the role of both patron and celebrity author, Scott seems to reject Pope’s “Arbuthonism” — the pose of the great writer plagued by dunces — and, instead, generously shares time and advice with his clients, demonstrating an intuition of the way the literary marketplace operates that is well ahead of his time. Finally, the chapter on Scott’s fans — another favorite of this reader — delves into the construction of the author by readers who strive to establish an affective connection with a celebrity figure. Particularly interesting and symptomatic of a modern form of celebrity worship is the fans’ attempt to exchange objects with the author, either by soliciting portraits, signatures, and literary contributions, or by offering poetical tributes or gifting the author with objects — dogs, portraits, seeds, tea, books, swords — in an effort to find “significance, valorization, direction, and other intangible benefits” which speak to their inner lives, their sense of themselves (168). Beautifully documented and analyzed, the correspondence with these “fetishistic fans” sheds light on the author’s and the readers’ participation in the creation of a new, modern culture of celebrity.

Among the highlights of this study are the impressive archival work done by the author (the book is the result of consulting collections of letters written from 1802 to 1832 by more than three hundred letter writers), the impeccable organization of the material (with concluding sections for each chapter that reiterate the main threads of the argument), and the nuanced close readings of the cited material. The illustrations included are also evocative of the time period, characters, and texts discussed, being particularly useful in clarifying who some of Scott’s correspondents were. One difficulty this reader had, however, was following the evolution of Scott’s celebrity due to a lack of signaling the time of publication and critical reception of his major works: such clarifications would have helped in contextualizing some of the correspondence exchanged and high appraisals of the author. I also wonder if the beautiful illustrations to Scott’s books by Charles Heath, William Allan, Charles Robert Leslie, Henry Corbould, or Richard Westall, to name just a few, have played a role in Scott’s positive reception of his works, and if his correspondence includes any references to decisions related to their artists, engravers, or style made in conjunction with the author. Finally, one noticeable omission from this otherwise impeccably researched monograph is Fred Inglis’s study, *A Short History of Celebrity*, which could have informed some of the author’s conclusions regarding the emergence of a new type of celebrity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Rather than flaws, however, these are simply suggestions that the author could pursue in future studies on Scott’s celebrification during his time and beyond, which this reader excitedly hopes for.

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